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Mrs Carly Ellis
Interim Head of School
Minerva Primary School
Outer Circle
Taunton
Somerset
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Dear Mrs Ellis

No formal designation inspection of Minerva Primary School

Following my visit with Aisha Wazuri, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 31 January and 1 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss behaviour and safeguarding in your school.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills was concerned about behaviour and the safety of pupils at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors met with the acting head of school, the chief executive officer of the trust (CEO), and other members of the school's extended leadership team, including the designated lead for safeguarding. Discussions were held with three members of the local advisory board (LAB), staff, pupils, parents and two representatives from the local authority. There was a telephone conversation with the chair of the board of directors of The Redstart Learning Partnership (TRLP).

Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times and conducted visits to lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to learning. A range of documentation was reviewed, including minutes of meetings from the LAB, a wide range of documents relating to behaviour and safety and safeguarding pupils, the single central record and checks on staff recruitment.

Having evaluated the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Minerva Primary School opened in September 2016. It is part of a multi-academy trust of five schools in Somerset. Its predecessor school, Halcon Primary School, was judged inadequate at its last inspection in February 2016.

There have been a number of staff changes since the school opened. The school has worked productively with the trust to ensure that difficulties in staff recruitment have been resolved. For example, the school's support staffing has been strengthened to include graduate internship appointments who provide learning support and additional support for pupils' behaviour and well-being. In recent weeks, a designated leader for behaviour and safety has also been appointed. A qualified teacher has been appointed to the Nursery provision for two- to four-year-olds. There are three newly qualified teachers in the school. There are student teachers through the First Teach programme.

There is an acting head of school who has been in post for 10 weeks. The CEO is also the executive principal. The CEO shares her time across the five schools in the trust. She is currently a designated safeguarding leader for this school. There are two other leaders who are responsible for safeguarding. The LAB is made up of eight representatives who work closely with the school and report to the executive board. There are currently two vacancies on the LAB.

Approximately two thirds of pupils are entitled to free schools meals. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is above the national average.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ensuring that the safeguarding and child protection arrangements keep pupils safe

Child protection arrangements to keep pupils safe are fit for purpose. School leaders ensure that staff induction procedures and basic safeguarding training are comprehensive. New staff are confident in applying child protection guidance. Staff are knowledgeable in spotting signs of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and neglect. Inspectors talked to many staff. They were able to articulate how to make referrals about child protection using the school's concern forms. School documentation shows that these concerns are followed up quickly and early referrals are used to reduce pupils' risk of harm. Regular multi-agency support, along with the deputy designated safeguarding leaders' persistence to follow up referrals, is making a positive difference to pupils' well-being. Leaders ensure that they take their own minutes of meetings of multi-agency meetings. This helps the school take immediate action and follow up any recommendations swiftly, even when local authority

documentation has not been received.

The trust prioritises leaders' attendance to the community 'One team' meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure that the school, community, housing department, children's services and police are working in unison to support families in need. The LAB identify that this has been an important step in bringing the school and community together.

The executive board has met its strategic duty to provide training for designated safeguarding leaders so that training is up to date and in line with legislation. However, the trust has not checked that the impact of staff training and the school's record-keeping is good enough. There is not a full understanding of which tier of leadership in the trust checks safeguarding culture in this school. As a result, lines of accountability are skewed and routine checks and measures are missed.

Pupils spoken to on inspection say that they feel safe. They say that staff help them when they have problems and they know who to go to. Pupils say they are happy with the support they get. Pupils have a strong understanding of e-safety. They know the dangers of the internet and how to keep safe when using mobile phones. Inspectors are satisfied that pupils apply their understanding of the e-safety curriculum and this helps them make measured decisions and report concerns to a responsible adult as required.

Staff have undertaken training in the government's 'Prevent' duty, to minimise extremism and radicalisation. However, the trust-wide guidance for lock down procedures in the event of critical incidents and terrorism is not fully understood by staff. Furthermore, other routine checks have not taken place. For example, in the recent past, fire drill practice has not been undertaken regularly enough.

The trust's systems to underpin effective record-keeping of staff vetting checks are not robust. Vetting checks are completed but they have not been collated in a central place. At the beginning of the visit, some aspects of the single central record were incomplete. As a result of the inspection findings, the trust rectified this during the inspection. Statutory requirements are now met.

Leaders, including the trust, have been slow to respond to the actions from the local authority safeguarding audit. For example, the LAB does not carry out sufficient quality assurance to check the culture of safeguarding in the school. A representative of the LAB does meet with a designated leader for safeguarding, however, their conversations do not extend to a full enough range of activities, nor do they happen to the timescale recommended by the local authority. A lack of minutes or records of these visits makes it difficult to provide accurate information to the board, or for the board to hold the school to account.

Leaders are working determinedly with families to improve pupils' attendance. This work is increasingly effective. As a result, pupils' attendance is increasing towards

the national average this year. Pupils who have previously been persistently absent say that staff help them catch up with their learning on their return to school. However, there remain too many pupils who do not attend school regularly enough. Leaders know that this remains a key priority.

Safeguarding checks are compliant in the Nursery. Children are safe and well looked after. Staff to children ratios are appropriate. Risk assessments and health and safety checks are in place and followed up. The Nursery has been part of the school since the school opened; however, some aspects of record-keeping are not yet aligned with the main school. There is no breach of policy of guidance.

Leadership is committed to providing an inclusive education for its pupils. Leaders have strengthened staffing ratios to enable staff to work with vulnerable pupils productively. As a result, pupils are supported increasingly well to stay in lessons. This is a marked improvement. When whole-school structures and systems do not work, leaders review these, share this information with staff and put new plans into place. For example, recent changes to the structure of lunchtimes for those pupils who regularly present challenging behaviour have improved pupils' safety overall.

During lunchtimes and breaktimes, supervision is adequate. However, there are very few activities for the vast majority of pupils to experience on the playground at these social times. This limits the way that pupils play together and interact. There is a predominance of running games. Leaders know there is more to do to improve the variety of playground games on offer.

When accidents occur, there is a school-wide system to follow. For example, parents and carers receive letters home if pupils have a bumped head. However, the application of this system is too inconsistent. This makes it difficult for leaders and the LAB to analyse and track whether playground incidents are reducing over time.

Leaders' actions to strengthen and formalise systems to improve behaviour to keep pupils safe are paying off. Increasingly, staff use the orange slip system to provide feedback to pupils and parents when pupils' behaviour has not met the required standard. However, leaders recognise that this system is not yet used consistently across the school. Inspectors' analysis on inspection shows that the severity of episodes of challenging behaviour displayed by pupils is reducing over time. For example, occasions of dangerous behaviour are considerably reduced. However, pupils' persistent disruption in lessons is still a regular feature in some classes. Leaders' actions to train staff to understand the precursors of challenging behaviour, what these are communicating and how to resolve them are improving considerably. As a result, the way in which staff manage challenging behaviour is improving quickly. Teaching staff are no longer routinely restraining pupils. This is the result of staff recognising the triggers which heighten pupils' anxiety levels and pupils understanding how to deal with their anger. However, leaders are not yet analysing behaviour records sufficiently. Therefore, they are not able to provide quantifiable evidence of improvement to the trust over time.

The role of graduate internships' and other adults' support is enabling pupils who have previously found learning in class difficult to access the school curriculum with greater success. This consistent approach is enabling pupils to be ready to learn. Most pupils achieve some success within the classroom environment. Pupils' withdrawal from lessons has reduced noticeably this year. This means that the vast majority of pupils gain full and equitable access to the curriculum on offer.

Very recently, the new behaviour leader is reviewing the current provision for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs, or those pupils who present challenging behaviour. He is supporting pupils in lessons increasingly well. However, this work is too recent to have a discernible impact on improving these pupils' outcomes overall. There is a clear intention to combine the work of trust leaders, head of school, behaviour leader and leader of SEN to bring about further improvement. However, this work is too recent to ensure that staff training is consistently applied and the legacy of pupils' underachievement is eradicated.

Many pupils have a sense of pride to be part of the school. They like wearing their blazers. A growing proportion of pupils present their work increasingly well in key stage 2. However, too many pupils do not yet have the resilience and determination to stick at their learning. When learning is not matched to pupils' needs, pupils can become distracted and so their progress falters.

Rates of exclusion remain too high but are showing signs of reduction in recent weeks. Pupils who have previously been excluded or are at risk of exclusions are provided with a range of additional support. These pupils are positive about the support they receive. School records show that these pupils' needs are increasingly met well. Leaders assure themselves that those pupils who benefit from off-site learning provision are safe through the detailed assessment and attendance information from the setting for these pupils.

Systems are in place for pupils to report bullying. Pupils say that when bullying occurs adults help them rectify any fallings-out they have. There are occasions of racist incidents and these are dealt with head on by leaders. However, the recording of such incidents is not tracked or monitored with the rigour required.

The school has an up-to-date complaints policy. When concerns are raised by parents or pupils, leaders follow this up. Leaders take minutes of meetings and statements from pupils where incidents have occurred. However, in the recent past there have been occasions when it has taken too long to resolve problems or the school's guidance to report concerns about pupils' well-being and safety have not been stringently followed. This has not been picked up by trust leaders quickly enough. Trust systems to monitor and check the regularity and severity of concerns are not good enough. As a result, when concerns have been raised they can slip through the net and remain unresolved. The trust and LAB have been too accepting of the information leaders have provided. The trust needs to strengthen its systems

swiftly to eradicate such wrongdoings being repeated.

Nevertheless, many parents are very positive about the changes that the new head of school and her team are making in recent weeks. Staff are also positive about the support they now receive.

External support

Regular meetings with police, health and social care representatives provide a cohesive level of support for pupils and their families. Additional support, such as play therapy, is effective in helping pupils process and talk about concerns and access learning. The school has completed the local authority annual safeguarding audit. However, the trust has been slow to check whether this advice has been followed. The trust has brokered a range of support from their Somerset Education Partner (SEP). This is having a positive impact on bolstering leadership capacity in the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- The trust should strengthen its checks on the culture of safeguarding at the school by:
 - conducting regular quality assurance visits to check the impact of staff training and trust-wide policies and guidance
 - ensuring itself that record-keeping, staff vetting checks, and the single central record are kept up to date
 - ensuring that the health and safety checks are completed in line with the school's risk assessments
 - improving systems and procedures for parents' and pupils' concerns, ensuring that leaders' actions are swift and appropriately matched to the school's safeguarding guidance
 - ensuring that staff training is stringently applied including reporting safeguarding concerns to the local authority.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local advisory board, the chair of the board of directors, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector